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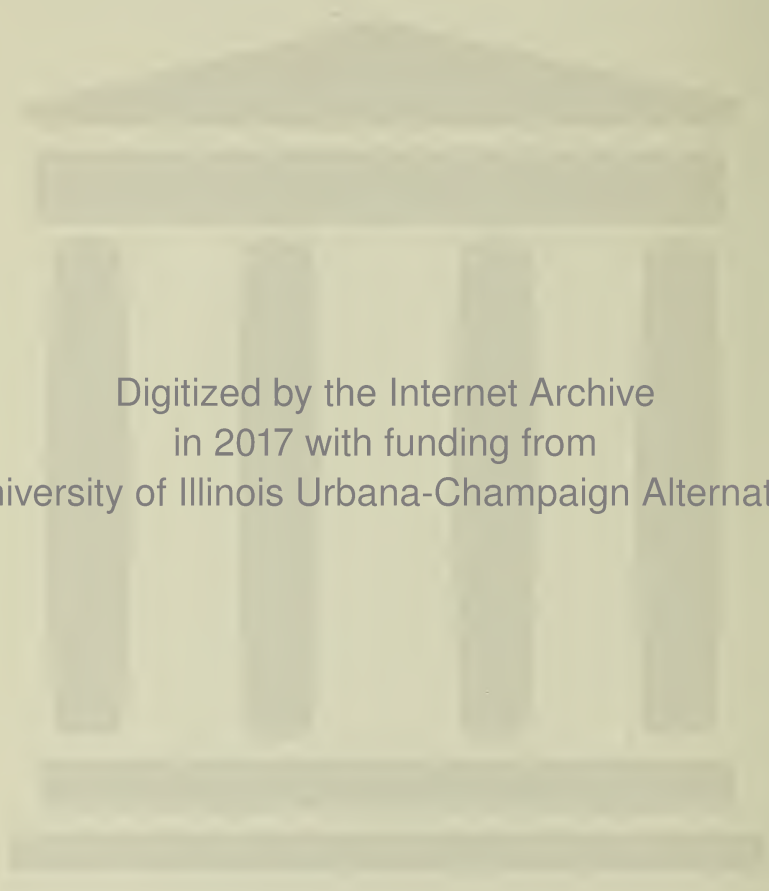
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**The Place of the Normal School in a
Democracy**

**Address before National Education Association, New York City,
July 4, 1916**

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THE PLACE OF THE NORMAL SCHOOL IN A DEMOCRACY

An address by President John R. Kirk of the Normal School, Kirksville, Missouri, delivered before the General Session of the National Education Association in Madison Square Garden, New York City, July 4, 1916.

The question of the place and function of the Normal School in a democracy raises other questions which are preliminary and fundamental. These questions are:

1. Whether the people in a democracy should express the will of the democracy?

2. Whether the judgment and the will of the democracy should determine the character and the extent of its institutions?

3. Whether there should always be in the democracy a dominant group constituting a specialized higher intelligence to do the thinking of the democracy for the democracy, and determine for the democracy what the character and the limitations of the institutions and the utilities of the democracy should be?

The answer to these questions is that a democracy is not obliged to do its business by proxy. The people of the democracy have a right to think and act for themselves. Otherwise there is no democracy.

There is great temptation to base official action upon the idea that educational advancement must have origin and first take form in the minds of the highly cultured few; but a great deal of the most serviceable part of American education at the present time did not have birth in the brain of higher education circles. As a matter of fact a large part of what is best in our scheme of education was forced into the curriculum, and many of the former, traditional, non-functioning elements of the now somewhat expurgated curriculum, were forced out of the curriculum by the pressure of the will of the awakening democracy.

It is altogether fortunate that the rank and file of

the democracy at times over-rule the tradition-bound judgment lockt up in higher education circles; and it is quite certain that there would now be no question as to the place of the Normal School in the democracy if the will of the democracy could be allowd to get at the issue.

The Normal School is of the democracy and for the democracy. From the outset in the days of Horace Mann and David P. Page, the Normal School has been, by its agitations, a source of contention and rivalry; or by obsequious conservatism and flabby formalism a negligible quantity in educational advancement. Its chief obstacle has always been traceable to higher education circles; and whenever the democracy has sought to establish Normal Schools, just then the existing higher education institutions have obstructed in toto the will of the democracy; or they have sought to dictate specifically what the curricula of such schools should not contain. They have not as a rule cared very much what superficialities or dogmas might get into the Normal School curricula, provided there could be assurance that the alleged sphere of existing institutions were not trespass upon.

Until some twenty odd years ago college and university men, as a rule, regarded the professional preparation of teachers unnecessary. Hence they naturally enuf opposed the Normal Schools. But they now seem to believ in the preparation of teachers. In any event about eighty per cent of all the colleges are obliged to have departments of education in order to avoid bankruptcy, while the best student-getting agency of the University is its School of Education.

But the adjustment of the Normal School to its place and function begins gradually to be grappled with by the people of the democracy. Each organized movement of external agencies for the limitation of the Normal School brings the issue to a more acute stage and final settlement nearer.

The long dominant minority in each of the great polit-

ical parties of America finds increasing difficulty in obstructing or manipulating the will of the democracy. The political dictator no longer enjoys a bed of roses. And so in education, any group of interested existing institutions combining to limit the field of an institution established by the democracy and for the service of the democracy, must more and more reckon with the sensitized will of the democracy.

The Initiative and Referendum, the Political Equality of Men and Women, the Recall of Judges, and their decisions—these and kindred ideals are working in the minds of the democracy. Universal education awakens the democracy. The elements of the democracy begin to think more freely for themselves. In education, the Normal School, long limited and handicapped by external interference, begins more effectively to function, and, thereby, it justifies the hope and the confidence of the democracy.

Let one illustration suffice:

A great educational foundation with benevolent, though misguided purpose enters a state of the Middle West. After investigation, it instigates re-organization of higher public education, with view to establishment of one single centralized dominating institution in the state with power of conferring all the higher degrees, and, thereby, subordinating and controlling all other public education agencies. There are some months of agitation. Finally, representatives of the democracy, by overwhelming preponderance make reply, and say, in substance, "You must take your hands off of this institution of the democracy, which is to prepare teachers for all the public schools of the democracy. We ourselves, will determine the place and function of our Normal School."

The investigators, in turn, declare that it is unwise and uneconomical and wasteful for the democracy thru its own representatives thus to transact its own business, but the representatives of the democracy promptly proceed to enforce the will of the democracy, and vote larger sums of money for an expanding teacher producing agency with great buildings, laboratories, libraries, gymnasiums, hospitals, athletic fields and faculty, such as the earlier college man

had not dreamd of; and the representatives of the democracy make these incontrovertible declarations:

"All public school education is the business of the democracy. You of the centralized higher education circles have had your eyes too much on the dead past. You have not wanted our children to have the instruction that would best function in their lives. You have obstructed the highest good of the greatest number. We are obliged to declare our freedom, and to think and act for ourselves. We have decided to have schools of our own, in which to educate teachers to direct all the activities of all the children in all the schools of the democracy".

The ideal of the democracy is further exprest by a young Governor of a Middle Western state. He had graduated from the University. He loved his alma mater, but he believed in the democracy. The school master visited the Governor, and said, "Governor, the people want teachers in the high schools and in the elementary schools to teach Manual Arts, Fine Arts, Domestic Arts, Cookery, Civics, Commercial Studies, Physical Education, Music and other motivating subjects, and Governor, ought the Normal School to do what the people want done?" And the Governor answered, "The Normal School is to produce teachers for the public schools of the democracy. The law says so. The people say so. The Normal School must find out what it takes to produce capable teachers. You cannot wait for the college to do any part of it. The college has no exclusiv sphere. No part of subject matter in education can be monopolized for the sake of anybody. Therefore, in the Normal School you may teach Horace or Calculus or whatever else is needed to make good teachers."

The place of the Normal School, therefore, in a democracy is defined and determind by what it is called upon to do. It is an exclusivly vocational institution. The full grown Normal School with means and opportunity and freedom prepares mature men and women to teach and supervise teaching in the public schools of every kind and grade. It covers four or more years in academic and pedagogic studies of college grade. Its requirements for en-

trance and for the Bachelor's Degree, are exactly equal to those of the best colleges. Its graduates do not need to be recast, or regraduated or relabeled by any other institution in order to secure permanent recognition in the teaching profession. They take rank, as they should, with the graduates of the Medical College and the Law School. A few of them already have good standing as graduate students. In the near future, large numbers of them will, after varying periods in teaching enter graduate courses at their own will and pleasure. Not all of the states will in the near future have the full-fledged Normal School. This will in part be due to interfering outside interests, in part to the unfruitful conservatism and caution of the Normal School administrators themselves.

But the short course Normal School, prematurely cut off at the end of the second year above high school, cannot be regarded a permanency. Its inadequacy too often has to be explained by those who love it best. In many states it has been, and in some states it is now, reasonably serviceable. It is representative of a transition stage. It will be outgrown because good teachers cannot be made out of typical high school graduates in two years' time.

The short course Normal School will have to be abandoned because the classifying of young intending teachers at the time they leave high school places public school organization on an unsound basis. It arbitrarily puts one group of intending teachers, without regard to natural endowments, into the shorter course Normal School, there to be mechanically trained and drilled into professional elementary teachers while another group with equal disregard for natural ability is sent into the longer course university or college to be made over into high school teachers.

This traditional, arbitrary and indefensible classification forces upon us the policy of keeping all the children from first grade to eighth grade inclusive under teachers having the shorter preparation and drawing the lower salaries, while furnishing all the children above the eighth grade



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teachers of longer preparation and higher salaries. But it is perfectly clear, as any sensible man or woman ought to know, that it takes as much scholarship and skill and ability to teach successfully in the sixth grade as it does to teach in any class in the high school; and a square deal demands as much salary for the one as the other.

Whenever we analyze these conditions, we see how unnatural and wasteful is the arbitrary classification of intending teachers which we now so widely practice. But the full-fledged Normal School of the twentieth-century does not artificially and abnormally force one group of students into the mold of elementary teachers, and another group into the mold of high school teachers. It differentiates the students gradually by natural processes, and not by premature conventional classifications.

The typical student does not, and can not, begin to know himself or herself, until some time in the third or fourth year above high school, and is not known by teachers earlier than that time. Therefore, it is a wasteful and indefensible classification which seeks to determine the special professional function of the intending teacher, prior to the Junior or Senior college year.

But the twentieth-century Normal School is in process of constant re-adjustment. It will always have many forms of under-graduate college courses. It will always include a large part of the now slowly dissolving college of liberal arts. It will utilize all available knowledge needed by public school teachers in elementary schools and high schools of city, town, village and rural community.

The place of the twentieth-century Normal School is within and of and close to the community life of the democracy. It will always conduct extensiv and intensiv studies, rational experimentation and never-ending, but always-varying demonstrations of all serviceable pedagogical procedure. Its place will always be among the leaders of constructiv and productiv educational thought in the state and the nation.